

BOWLES'S NEW AND ACCURATE MAP OF THE WORLD, OR TERRESTRIAL GLOBE, laid down from the BEST OBSERVATIONS and NEWEST DISCOVERIES; particularly those of the late Captain JAMES COOK, and other celebrated CIRCUMNAVIGATORS: Illustrated with a variety of useful PROJECTIONS and REPRESENTATIONS of the HEAVENLY BODIES: the most approved ASTRONOMICAL and GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS, TABLES, and PROBLEMS, With an easy and familiar Explanation of the most curious and interesting PHENOMENA in the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM. Printed for the Proprietor, C. Bowles, in Pall Mall.



# Measuring Progress in Reconstructing Afghanistan

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## Introduction by Jason Warner, FMSO

*Since the international community first became engaged in the process of post-conflict reconstruction, observers around the world have been seeking effective ways to monitor outcomes of these efforts. Despite this long-held attention, however, a consensus has yet to be reached on which metric for evaluation should be used. As a result, the process of monitoring post-conflict rebuilding efforts remains scattershot and un-streamlined.*

*To this end, authors Davids, Rietjens and Soeters argue that the creation of a unified metric would have innumerable benefits for making future reconstruction efforts more effective. To lay the groundwork for such a project, they turn their sights to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Using the Afghan Country Stability Picture (ACSP) — a database of some 85,000 projects — they seek to find correlative patterns between donor priorities, geographical locations, aid effectiveness and tendencies for project completion. Ultimately, they hope to use information gleaned from their analysis of Afghanistan for the creation of a tool to assess post-conflict reconstruction across the world.*

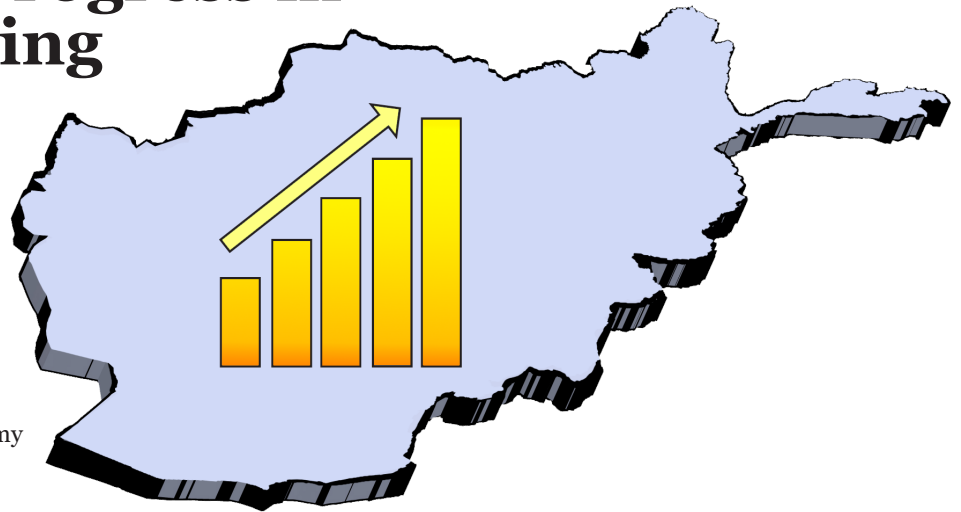
*This paper admirably compels readers regarding the need to streamline the evaluation process of international community nation-building efforts. However, several questions remain: in the real world, how is such a process to be standardized, particularly when past efforts by the international development community to create similar monitoring criteria have had only limited success? Similarly, given that resources devoted to reconstruction projects are already scarce, how does a country or coalition devote a greater share of each organization's operating budget towards monitoring — especially when such funds could be used to provide tangible necessities such as food, healthcare and education? Finally, the question of extrapolation lingers. Is it a risk to assume that the same assessment metric can be applied universally across world regions, despite wildly divergent ground-level realities? Would this approach obscure the reality more than it would reveal it?*

*These are tough questions to a challenging endeavor undertaken by Davids, Rietjens and Soeters, whose substantive research has, at a minimum, improved upon the evaluation of post-conflict reconstruction.*

# Measuring Progress in Reconstructing Afghanistan

By Christiaan Davids,  
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## Abstract

**N**ation building and its supporting policy development should no longer occur without a careful cost-benefit analysis. This article attempts to measure the progress of the Afghan reconstruction process, in which the militaries of 42 countries and many different international and local humanitarian organizations are currently engaged. It presents results from the Afghan Country Stability Picture (ACSP), a database containing detailed information on approximately 85,000 projects (related to such sectors as water, energy, education, and governance) in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2008. Using this quantitative database, we reveal descriptive findings and correlative relations between project variables such as timeframe, location, costs, donor characteristics, the security situation, and learning experiences. We argue that the correlations between these variables, as seen in the ACSP, may be suitable to develop a wider framework capable of gauging the prospects for both stability and prosperity in other post-conflict situations.

**“Nation building and its supporting policy development should no longer occur without a careful cost-benefit analysis.”**

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## 1. Introduction

The international community is frequently called upon to stabilize countries and regions affected by conflict. In these operations, military and civilian workers operate together in states where local administrations and security organizations often perform inadequately and basic public services are lacking. Whereas peacekeeping in the Cold War era was typically limited to monitoring ceasefires between two parties and manning buffer-zones, today Western nations have developed an interest in achieving more ambitious goals, including – most importantly for this study – the re-building of nations in post-conflict situations (Kang and Meernik, 2004; Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). Therein, Western nations’ goals include aiding in stabilization, providing humanitarian aid, facilitating post-war reconstruction, encouraging economic and social rehabilitation, leading security sector reform and promoting democratization.

Although nation building and reconstruction attract a great deal of attention these days, these processes are decidedly not new. Various interventions by

the United States and certain European powers – in places such as South Korea, Japan, Haiti and East Timor – have preceded the current activities in Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g. Fukuyama, 2006). In the latter, previous attempts to modernize the country’s infrastructure and security sector testify that the ambition to develop a nation from outside is not a new phenomenon (Cullather, 2002).

Throughout the history of nation building, participants have recognized the undeniable importance of assessment and monitoring. In an attempt to go beyond the formulation of simply “visions of the future,” the assessment of post-conflict nation building is characterized by its focus on the actual implementation of projects and the delivery of collective goods and services (Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). By assessing such progress it may be possible to improve the coordination, communication and accountability of the activities of the contributing organizations and countries (Diehl, 2008; Fast and Neufeldt, 2005).

To this end, observers have given widespread attention to performance measurement in conflict literature (e.g. Chauvet & Collier, 2008; Donini, 2007; Freeman, 2007; Rietjens & Bollen, 2007). Throughout these various perspectives, however, we contend that there is no singular, widely-used framework to interpret the progress achieved by organizations engaged in nation building (e.g., Rietjens and Bollen, 2008). Nor is there a solid set of numbers for measurement to form an understanding of the raw data (Clancy and Crosset, 2007). Many policy evaluations in this field are built on qualitative descriptions and assessments of the developments under scrutiny (e.g., Tondini, 2007). Of course, these evaluations are worthwhile, but such approaches lack the insights and reliability that go beyond the inherent limitations of the individual evaluator.

This article represents an attempt to measure nation building progress and reconstruction in Afghanistan based on the analysis of quantitative data. This data is taken from the Afghanistan Country Stability Picture (ACSP), a database containing information on reconstruction and development projects from all over the country. The result is a dataset addressing approximately 85,000 projects undertaken in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2008. For each project, ACSP records several characteristics including the start date, cost, location and the pillar of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) under which the project is categorized (for example, governance, infrastructure, or health and nutrition).

Using the ACSP to measure the progress and performance of organizations in Afghan can be advantageous. The database is widely supported by both military and civilian actors in the country, which minimizes potential friction over the figures that could otherwise arise between the two entities. Updating ACSP requires few resources and therefore minimizes the need for extra bureaucracy. Finally, the project records in ACSP are relatively simple, objective, and are presented as quantitative data that give little space for discussion. Despite these advantages, ACSP’s limitation is that it focuses on efforts and outputs of *projects*, rather than *collective societal outcomes* such as the improvement of the health situation of the Afghan population in a particular province. Therefore, while ACSP does contribute in substantive ways to understanding the efficacy of post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, by no means does it represent a flawless dataset.

In sum, this article provides new insights and understandings of reconstruction activities in Afghanistan through quantitative analysis, and contributes to the development and use of progress and performance-based measurements in nation building and reconstruction more broadly. The next section provides an overview of our understanding of progress and performance measurement in the public sector in general and in nation building and reconstruction projects in particular. Section three outlines the methodology of our analysis, while the fourth section provides descriptive and explanatory analyses of the ACSP dataset. The article ends with conclusions about future ways of improving both the data and its use in policy evaluation.

## 2. Measuring Progress and Performance in Nation building

Foremost, it is important to understand the notion of “management accounting,” or the process of monitoring and assessing projects and their application to reconstruction efforts. Bisbe and Otley (2004) refer to such management accounting systems simply as a set of “procedures and processes that managers and other organizational participants use in order to help ensure the achievement of their goals and the goals of their organizations.” To date, management accounting and control systems have received insufficient attention in the context of defense organizations and nation building activities (i.e. Grönlund and Catasús, 2005; Lambert, 2002). This is regrettable, because lessons from this field of expertise may be useful for the measurement and evaluation of nation building activities.

Though defense organizations have underutilized such frameworks, other international organizations have a history of employing them. An early attempt at measuring progress in nation building can be found in a 1997 DFI International study on effective transitions in United Nations peace operations (Blechman et al., 1997). Another example is the World Bank Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) Initiative’s transitional results matrix that has sought to measure progress in a variety of countries, including Liberia and Haiti. The Fund for Peace developed a comprehensive model that was applied to Iraq. Furthermore, the Center for Strategic and International Studies developed a model for measuring progress and applied it to both Iraq and Afghanistan’s reconstruction (Cohen, 2006).

More recently however, military organizations – including NATO, which is leading the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan – have begun to recognize the importance of management accounting, and have implemented their own effect measurement methodologies. ISAF’s methodology is known as an effects-based approach to operations (EBAO). In general, EBAO seeks to create a holistic picture of the operational environment to enhance military planning, the conduct of operations, and the assessment of the efficacy of those operations (Prescott, 2008). Within this broader view, commanders and staff at all levels should then be able to synchronize their efforts with those of other governmental, nongovernmental, and international organizations.

Measuring the progress and the performance of organizations that participate in nation building and reconstruction is important for several reasons. First, such measurements are likely to create transparency and can thus contribute to increased donor and governmental accountability (Noordegraaf and Abma, 2003; Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; de Bruijn, 2007). Through undertaking such measurements, individuals and organizations can be cognizant of the exact number of resources used in any given project (Glenn and Gayton, 2008). Second, such measurements enable the evaluation of outputs and, therefore, the strengthening of effective administration (Noordegraaf and Abma, 2003). Based on this evaluation, military commanders and civilian leaders can reallocate resources or adjust their strategic planning as necessary. Third, such progress measurement enables organizations to learn what they do well and when improvements are possible (de Bruijn, 2007). A final reason is that such measurement can improve the communication between participating organizations such as NATO, the United Nations and host nation authorities. This can help align the international community’s expectations with those of the host nation stakeholders, a phenomenon that United States General David Petraeus termed ‘managing expectations’ (Petraeus, 2008).

However, applying accounting and control concepts and measurements to reconstruction activities is not without difficulties. First, a retrospective look at efforts to establish measures of progress in nation building indicate that operations between organizations have been disconnected from each other, characterized by a range of disparate terminologies and methodologies (Cohen, 2006). Further, with the presence of so many metrics within many institutions (Thiel and Leeuw, 2008), selecting the right measures is difficult. Organizations must increasingly balance the desire to maintain simple, easily assessed, comprehensible metrics with the so-called “kitchen-sink approach,” in which increased data



collection and subsequent analyses attempt to satisfy all prospective users' requirements (Glenn and Gayton, 2008).

Second, finding a causal relationship between actions and outcomes is difficult in general, but particularly so in nation building and reconstruction. To establish causality – that action A results in outcome B – requires that very specific and oftentimes impossible conditions be met (Glenn and Gayton, 2008). A commander of an American military unit observed:

Even if we can successfully measure an outcome, it's extremely hard to know what caused the outcome. There are so many things happening at once that causal relationships are next to impossible to identify. There is a certain amount of guessing and operational art in measuring success (Glenn and Gayton, 2008).

Third, the process of measurement frequently increases bureaucracy. When an organization emphasizes performance measurement, it often assigns considerable resources to producing data on results and impact. This can increase the load of bureaucracy enormously. Power (1994) even refers to this phenomenon as the “audit explosion” or “audit society.”

Finally, the complex relationship between civilian agencies and military actors can hamper an integrated attempt to measure the performance of nation building. Although many researchers and practitioners support the idea that successfully coordinated civilian and military efforts are a key to successful nation building (Rietjens, 2008), civilian agencies' associations with a potentially unwelcome military force is risky and can result in the agencies losing the protective patina of neutrality (Donini et al., 2004; Macrae, 2002; Wheeler and Harmer, 2006; Hasegawa, 2008). Since civilian actors and their military counterparts frequently have different objectives and different ways of achieving these (Rietjens, 2008), they look favorably upon cooperation as long as they expect it to serve their best interests (Seiple, 1996). This can easily lead to opportunistic behavior. Moreover, the differences in organizational culture, expertise, resources and timeframes between the two sets of actors also contribute to this complexity (Abiew, 2003; Bollen, 2002).

Afghanistan is an exemplary case of this last problem, a country in which many military and civilian organizations operate side by side in the process of nation building, and thus tandemly attempt to measure their activities' performances. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) uses EBAO, while USAID, the United Nations Mission of Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other civilian agencies use their own control systems. These inconsistencies, coupled with the aforementioned problems inherent to performance measurement, result in incorrect, incomplete and politically motivated presentations of the performance regarding various aspects of nation building (Rietjens, 2008; Glenn and Gayton, 2008).

### **3. Methodology**

Having recounted the definition, history, benefits and drawbacks of assessment monitoring in nation building, the discussion now turns to the case study at hand. As mentioned in the introduction, this article uses the ACSP to develop new insights and understandings of nation building activities in Afghanistan. This 85,000-project database, created specifically to manage and control progress and performance during nation building, reconstruction, and development activities in Afghanistan, is sourced from a multiplicity of entities including the Afghan government, donors, provincial reconstruction teams and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It's collective information covers a range of efforts, from the reconstruction of roads, bridges, dams and schools to the development and introduction of basic health packages in the country. The ACSP's primary purpose is to enable widespread situational awareness and coordination throughout the Afghan government, NATO and the development community and to align and assess their strategic programs in Afghanistan. Because of the varied sources of its information, it cannot be controlled by one organization (e.g., ISAF) but – in theory – can be used to synchronize efforts between organizations.

The first part of our research consisted of interviews, briefings and participation in meetings with NATO officials during the July-November 2007 deployment of our first author to Kandahar. This deployment enabled him to develop a more profound understanding of the background, architecture and relevance of the ACSP. In 2008, using relevant literature, we further analyzed and discussed the resulting dataset from this period. Subsequently, we re-coded the initial dataset for statistical testing and examined the collected data.

In January 2009, our remaining two authors conducted a second part of the research during a field visit to Afghanistan. As with the first portion of our study, they met with different NATO officials in Kandahar as well as Kabul. This second part proved useful in refining our understanding of the ACSP and updating our own ACSP dataset. Moreover, this period allowed us to conduct interviews in much more detail and discuss our earlier findings with practitioners.

### **3.1. Data**

The ACSP dataset, which served as input for our research, consisted of 84,641 project records. The original dataset used 25 variables including identification and information processing characteristics that were less relevant for our purpose. After analyzing the dataset in combination with interviews, briefings, meeting reports and literature, we decided to use a number of these 25 variables as our basic set.<sup>1</sup> Among these were: “start date,” “end date,” “region,” “cost,” “status,” “Afghan national development strategy (ANDS) sector,” and “implementing partner.” In addition, we defined two new variables: “days completed per project” and “turnover per project per day” to address the absorption capacity in Afghanistan.

As a second measure, we re-coded the variable “region” to a new variable named “security situation” using polling data we collected during our field visits. From 2006 to 2008, field workers conducted eight polls (N = 5650) throughout Afghanistan to develop insight into the perceptions of Afghans regarding security.<sup>2</sup> We used the polling question, “How is the security situation in your area?”, allowing the participant to provide a rating between one (worst) and ten (best). The question and its results facilitated the classification of the five NATO regions: the capital (Kabul and surroundings), the north, the east, the west and the south. An examination of the polling data showed one region with a mean of five, two regions with a mean of seven and two regions with a mean of eight. We cross referenced the polling data with Gauster (2008) and Asia Foundation (2007) and coded the regions in three security classes: insecure (south), medium secure (east and west) and relatively secure (north and capital).

Third, we re-coded the variable “project status” to the indicators “completed,” “ongoing,” “cancelled/suspended,” and “unknown.” In this way, time-related analyses were possible and differences between regions could be analyzed.

Fourth, we created a dichotomous variable to indicate local participation. We therefore re-coded the variable “implementation partner” and used the involvement of the Afghan community as the indicator for local participation.

Our fifth measure was the creation of dummy variables to conduct a regression analysis with the “security situation,” “Afghan participation,” and “military (CIMIC) versus non-military (USAID).” We subsequently validated the ACSP variables with graphs and descriptive analyses to identify outliers and cells that contained erroneous data (such as start dates before 2002 or after 2009, and days completed less than zero). The ACSP database holds data that is updated at different intervals. To eliminate possible effects of data that has not been updated near the end of 2008, and to eliminate projects that were not monitored after initial registration, we did not use projects with missing cells on “start date” and projects started after 2007. On the basis of these examinations we discarded 23,418 records, which decreased our final dataset to 61,223 projects ranging in date from 2002 to 2007.



## 4. Findings

### *Projects and Strategies*

Table 1 indicates the regions in which various projects have been carried, between 2002 and 2007. Of the 61,223 projects in the database, over 44% have been executed in the capital and the eastern part of the country. This is not surprising since the activities of the international community, both military and civilian, have typically first originated in Kabul. A second reason for the heavy concentration of projects in the north and east is that these regions have the highest population densities in the country, and thus the need for support tends to be the highest. However, in 2004, military and development activities started to incorporate other regions of the country, expanding from their initial, relatively safe northern and eastern locations to include the relatively insecure southern areas.

Further analyses indicate that very few projects have been undertaken in the regions immediately bordering Pakistan, most notably along the so-called Federally Administered Tribal Area. In these regions conflict is rife (e.g. Rashid, 2008; Johnson and Mason, 2008), thus preventing safe working conditions for military personnel and development agents alike. Moreover, the relatively paltry number of projects in this region can be explained by the region's low population density, the limited number of ISAF troops, and the significant distance from the nation's political center. These developments highlight the fact that so-called "structural holes" in project implementation may occur due to understandable lopsided attention of international and domestic actors to the 'easier' operational environments in the country (Burt, 1992).

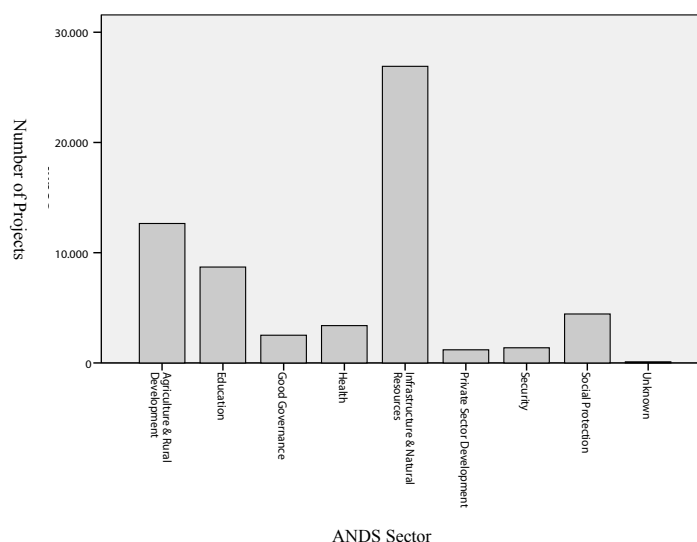
Table 1 shows that more than 61,000 projects have been executed in the period between 2002 and 2007. With some 200 projects in 2002, the subsequent year saw projects rise 60 times to a total of 12,318 by 2004. Hence, in the first three years, there was a steep rise in the number of projects, with the number remaining stable in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The next year, in 2007, projects rocketed up to almost 22,000.

*Table 1: Projects in Different Regions by Year*

StartYear	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Region							
Capital	22,6%	6,5%	4,5%	6,0%	4,8%	5,4%	5,3%
East	36,0%	48,0%	42,7%	46,5%	45,1%	28,5%	39,1%
North	8,8%	24,9%	20,2%	25,0%	18,7%	23,9%	22,3%
South	22,6%	12,2%	23,6%	9,1%	10,2%	30,0%	19,8%
West	9,6%	7,4%	8,7%	12,6%	20,7%	11,1%	12,7%
Unknown	0,4%	1,0%	0,3%	0,8%	0,6%	1,1%	0,8%
<b>Total</b>	239	2232	12318	12279	12481	21674	61223

In connection to Table 1, Figure 1 shows the various types of projects undertaken in Afghanistan. Information about the mix of projects and developments, over time, can be important to understanding whether early strategies – such as those intended to have quick impacts – eventually transformed into, for example, long-term projects supporting the Afghan government. Figure 1 indicates that the majority of projects (almost 45%) relate to the development of infrastructure and natural resources (roads, water supply, power). The second greatest number are agricultural and rural development projects (20%), followed by projects focused on education, social protection and health. Projects in the field of good governance are still relatively scarce, as are those relating to private sector development. The former condition might be explained by the heavily entrenched and rather rigid nature of Afghan politics, while the latter might be explained by the fact that military personnel and aid workers are rarely hired to undertake wide-reaching macro-economic reforms. This indicates that the institutional conditions for Western-style economic development in the country are still weak.

Figure 1: Projects and the Afghan National Development Sector Strategy



Organizations follow divergent strategies to achieve their goals. Because USAID and the military's CIMIC framework are the largest project undertakers in Afghanistan (accounting for some 20,000 projects altogether), we primarily analyze differences in the projects' foci for these two entities. Table 2 offers a breakdown of the projects into activities conducted. USAID is particularly inclined to conduct projects in the fields of agriculture and rural development (about 40% of its total projects) and education (17%), whereas ISAF focuses not only on infrastructure and natural resources (27% of their projects), but also on social protection (almost 18%) and education (17%). The relatively few projects relating to private sector development are initiated five times more often by USAID than by the military. All these differences are significant (Chi-Square-test,  $p = 0,00$ ). The focus of projects conducted by ISAF may be explained by the military 'can-do' culture as well as its engineering orientation toward quick fixes and tangible results. This may also stem from the relatively short stay of military personnel in the mission area. Infrastructure, natural resource development (in particular energy) and to a lesser extent education are other examples of such quick impact projects.

Table 2: CIMIC and USAID Projects

ANDS Sector	CIMIC	USAID	Total
Agriculture & Rural Development	7,1%	40,7%	30,4%
Education	17,4%	17,3%	17,4%
Good Governance	9,7%	9,0%	9,2%
Health	10,1%	8,6%	9,1%
Infrastructure & Natural Resources	27,7%	9,7%	15,2%
Private Sector Development	1,3%	6,6%	5,0%
Security	6,9%	0,5%	2,4%
Social Protection	18,3%	7,6%	10,8%
Unknown	1,5%	0,0%	0,5%
Total	6114	13869	19983

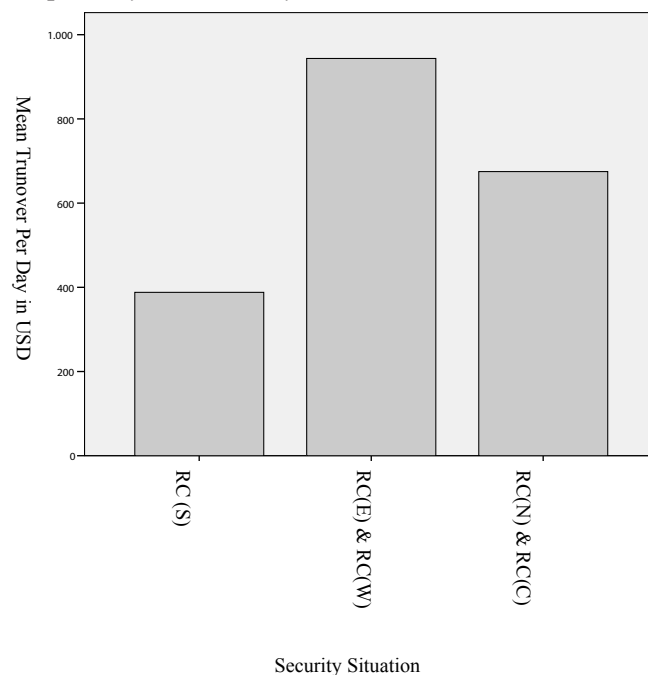
## 4.1. Absorption Capacity

The absorption capacity, defined as the average expenditure or turnover per project per day, can be used as one of the indicators to measure progress in an area of operation or of an organization. Between 2002 and 2005, throughout Afghanistan's various regions, the absorption capacity remained nearly stable. In 2006, it rose rapidly up to \$2,500. However, in the southern region and in the capital of Kabul, the year

2007 showed a steep decline in mean project turnover costs. This fall was no doubt precipitated by the dramatically deteriorating security situation in those areas beginning in 2006, (Rashid, 2008), a reality that was underlined by the results of our own polling amongst local populations in the various regions of the country.<sup>3</sup> During this same period, expenditures in the western, northern and especially eastern regions stabilized or even grew.

Figure 2 shows that the eastern and the western regions – both of which are relatively safe – have the highest mean expenditure per project per day, whereas the more insecure south has the lowest. In Kabul, and in the northern part of the country, the mean expenditure is twice as high as in the south but significantly lower than in the east and the west. The non-parametric tests indicate significant differences between the ranks' mean turnover per day (Chi Square-test;  $p=0,00$ ).

*Figure 2: Mean Turnover per Day and Security Situation*



## 4.2. Afghan Participation

An important aspect of reconstruction activities in conflict-ridden countries such as Afghanistan is that domestic civil society must view the international actors within the country as being welcomed and legitimate. This legitimacy is likely to grow when local partners participate in the formulation, development and implementation of the projects, as it helps to encourage sustainability, local ownership and capacity building (Natsios, 2005; Narten, 2008; Rietjens et al., 2009). Developments and information regarding the participation of local partners is therefore an important aspect in measuring progress in nation building and the performance of organizations.

We distinguished between projects that were the sole responsibility of international actors (line “0” in Figure 3) and projects that were conducted largely by local Afghan institutions and agencies (line “1” in Figure 3). Figure 3 demonstrates that during 2002, Afghan stakeholders participated in very few projects. In 2003, Afghan participation increased and in 2004, projects undertaken in tandem with Afghan stakeholders even outnumbered those undertaken without local input. The decrease in local participation in 2006 is remarkable and comprehensible only by pointing again to the decline in the security situation.

Several reasons may be identified as to why many projects have been conducted without the



involvement of Afghan stakeholders. While the central government holds extensive *constitutional authority* over the provinces, Kabul's limited *de facto* ability to intervene and its consequent accommodation of small-scale power brokers in the provinces have left factional chiefs in control of many local governments (Jalali 2006). This often makes it very difficult for international actors – both military and civilian – to identify reliable and legitimate Afghan partners for the executed projects. Another reason for the sometimes limited involvement of Afghan stakeholders may be the negative attitudes that Afghan civilian actors hold towards foreigners, most notably Western military members. Examples abound of local villagers being threatened, injured or even killed, after interacting with foreign troops. These dangerous precedents clearly have a deleterious impact on the willingness of local Afghans to participate in ISAF and USAID projects. A final reason likely relates to timing. Civilian organizations, especially development organizations, are sometimes prepared to stay in a given country for a period of five to ten years to execute their projects, whereas the military will often have a time horizon limited to two or three years. Most ISAF units rotate their personnel every four to six months, and this high turnover rate likely hampers their interactions with Afghan stakeholders.

Figure 3: Local Participation

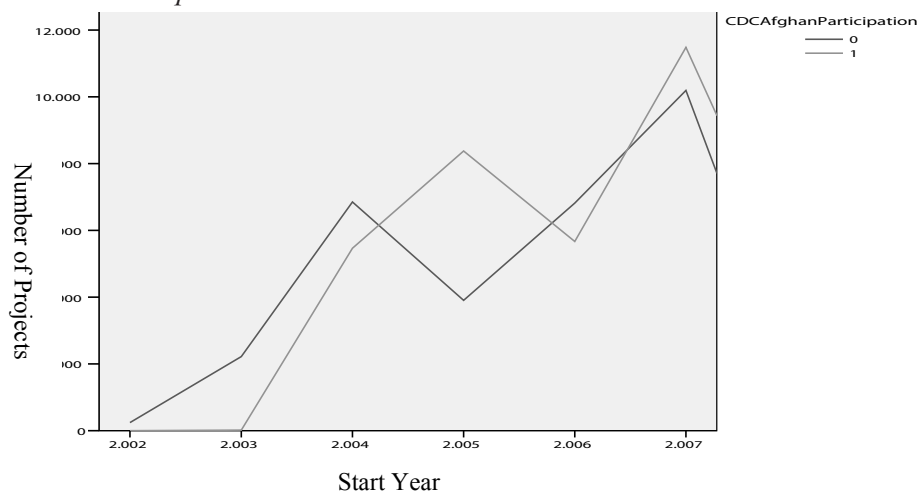


Table 3 shows that the distribution of Afghan participation in the various regions differs significantly (Chi Square test;  $p=0,00$ ). In particular, the southern region contains relatively few projects in which Afghan stakeholders were involved. In contrast, the situation is opposite for the northern region. These differences can be explained by the problematic security situation in the southern region, which hampers both the military and civilian agencies to freely move through the area and consult with Afghan stakeholders on a frequent basis. Moreover, as mentioned previously, Afghan participants in the southern districts may feel more reluctant to participate in projects initiated by the international community.

Table 3: Local Participation and Regions

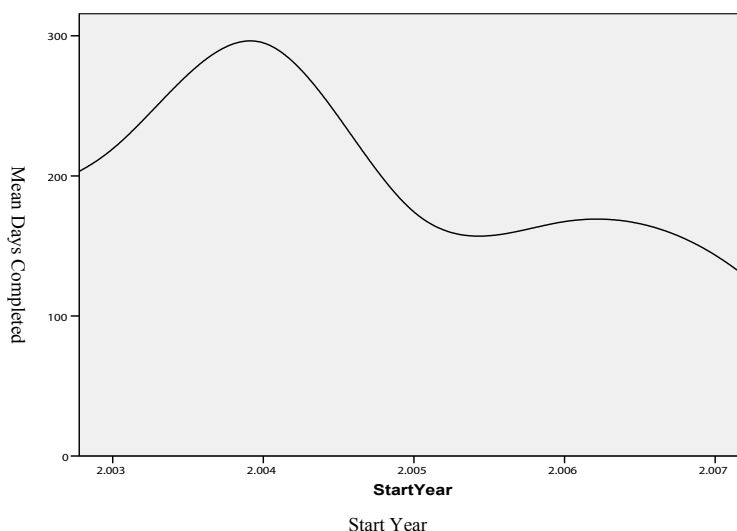
Region	Afghan Participation		Total
	No	Yes	
Capital	3,2%	2,1%	5,3%
East	17,0%	22,1%	39,1%
North	7,3%	15,0%	22,3%
South	15,1%	4,8%	19,9%
West	5,9%	6,8%	12,7%
Unknown	0,7%	0,0%	0,7%
Total	30217	31006	61223

### 4.3. Experience and Learning

In addition, we have tried to reveal the completion time for projects. This is useful information, as organizations tend to take a longer time to complete projects upon initial entry into a country – when they still need to assess local communities – than after months of in-country experience. Presumably, the longer time that an organization spends operating in a specific post-conflict environment, the better it becomes at navigating local terrain and the quicker it can complete projects.

Figure 4 shows interesting results in this regard. We have calculated the average number of days to project completion in various years. The figure shows that between 2003 and 2004, the duration of projects increased gradually. This figure declined sharply in the following two years. After stabilizing in 2006, it declined again in 2007.

*Figure 4: Experience Curve*



The graph above clearly resembles the so-called “experience” curve, popular in economic theory. This curve indicates systematic reductions in production costs and time over the life of a product. Two phenomena explain this: learning effects and economies of scale (e.g. Hill, 2001). Learning effects refer to cost and time savings that come from learning by doing and repeating the same activities. Labor productivity increases over time as individuals learn the most efficient ways to perform their tasks.

We can see both effects quite clearly in the projects in Afghanistan. In the beginning of the peace support and reconstruction operations in early 2002, international organizations needed to learn how to operate in the new, foreign environment. Apparently, after this start-up stage they became more adept at dealing with local participants, and correspondingly, there is a rapid decrease in the average project completion time. Stabilization of this dynamic in 2006 likely reflects military and NGO adjustments to increased hostilities. In 2007, the average project completion time decreased again. This is an important finding, as success and speed generate confidence in the reconstruction process. Indeed, this is so important that we wanted to test the effect in a robust multivariate model.

In this analysis, the time-related “experience” effect turned out to be the most important factor in explaining the variance in project durations (“days completed”). To avoid artificially high correlations, we conducted this analysis on the projects that commenced before 2007 and did not last longer than 365 days; hence, the relatively shorter projects (about 7,000). We conducted this analysis using “start date” (beta = -, 37, sign.), a dummy variable concerning the security situation in the country (beta = -, 03, sign.), the

“Afghan participation” (beta = 0,003, non-sign.), and a dummy variable “CIMIC-USAID” (beta= -, 13, sign.) as independent variables. This analysis (adj. R square is 0,197) indicated that the duration of this set of relatively shorter projects (average 142 days) is very strongly influenced by – as said – the net effect of the start date (the more recent, the shorter), slightly by the security situation (shorter in safer regions), and somewhat strongly by who has initiated the project (the military projects focusing on infrastructure took on average almost 30 days less to be completed than the USAID projects). Afghan participation does not play a significant role in this analysis. This regression analysis shows the strength of the “experience” curve over the other significant variables, i.e. the safety situation and the type of projects (as indicated by the difference between military and USAID projects).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Over the last several decades, performance measurement has become increasingly important in public sector administration. Politicians and civil societies alike want to know about the results achieved with the resources expended by the government on their behalf (de Bruijn, 2007); more specifically, they want to know about the benefits generated for society at large in the expenditure of these resources.

So far, however, this development has not been very strong in the field of foreign development assistance and aid policies. The cry for help from disaster-struck and conflict-ridden regions in the world is often so emotionally charged that asking for insight into efficiency and effectiveness seems to be almost inhuman. Thanks to this and various other factors, we know surprisingly little about where aid and assistance money flows, and how well it is actually spent (e.g. Collier, 2007).

The same applies to military expenditures in post-conflict societies. However, given that developmental assistance and current military operations are *policies of choice in regions of choice*, these activities will increasingly have to compete with policy expenditures at home, such as improving the national economy, national education and national health care. Therefore, governments need to demonstrate the value of the activities that are accomplished in those far-flung regions to their domestic constituencies. Proving the value of such activities is difficult. As we have seen previously, in the public sector, measuring progress in the delivery of policies is complicated. There are more stakeholders in the political arena who have their own views, perceptions and ambitions, all of which are less tangible and confusingly interrelated.

All of this applies equally to nation building and reconstruction in post-conflict areas, such as Afghanistan. Yet, it is inevitable in such endeavors that some sort of progress and performance measurement will be used in order to provide at least an indication of what is being reached. In this article we have used a database consisting of quantitative data concerning the projects that have been implemented in the framework of nation building in Afghanistan in the period 2002-2008.

We have been able to show that there is a gradual but strong growth in the number of projects over the years; that projects are increasingly more evenly spread over the regions in the country; that a threatened security situation plays a hampering role; that Afghan participation in the projects is not small, yet the effectiveness of this legitimacy is largely unknown; that the projects are executed faster over the years, commensurate with the nation builders’ experience; and that the military and the civil assistance workers seem to have developed a division of labor since they focus on different types of projects.

This seems to be good news. However, the ACSP database contains no information on the real value that the completed projects constitute in the eyes of the local population, and no information on how the results of the projects are being used, and by whom. For these reasons, it is important to expand the data with a number of other characteristics. However, it is first



necessary to share the results of this data with the local and regional stakeholders and to determine the completed projects' value to the local communities. Too often, such information stays in the upper echelons of the international civilian and military organizations, precluding profitable discussions with local political entities (Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). In nation building, enhancing the 'local footprint' appears necessary in all stages of policy making, not the least in progress and performance measurement.

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## ANNEX A ACSP VARIABLES

Number	Variable	Description	Used in Research Database
1	ID	Identification Number	N
2	HQ_ISAF URN	Identification Number	N
3	PROJECT NUMBER	Identification Number	N
4	REGION	ISAF Region	Y
5	PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team	N
6	ANDS SECTOR	Afghan National Development Strategy	Y
7	ASIC SECTOR	Afghanistan Standard Industrial Classification	N
8	ASIC ACTIVITY	Afghanistan Standard Industrial Classification Activity	N
9	CURRENT ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	Description of activities	N
10	PROVINCE	Afghan Province	Y
11	DISTRICT NAME 2	Specification in Province	N
12	VILLAGE	Village Name	N
13	LATITUDE	Latitude	Y—only plots during research
14	LONGITUDE	Longitude	Y—only plots during research
15	LOC MGRS	Military Grid	Y—only

		Reference System locator	plots during research
16	COST	Costs in US Dollar	Y
17	MINISTRY ABBR	Abbreviation of Ministry Policy Area	N
18	IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	Partner of ISAF for implementation of a project	Y
19	STATUS	Status of project	Y
20	START DATE	Start date of project	Y
21	END DATE	End date of project	Y
22	DONOR	Donor for project	N
23	INFO DATE	Date records are updated	N
24	SOURCE	Information Source	N
25	REMARKS	Remarks	N

## (Endnotes)

1. The ACSP database consists of four main data groups that are combined in one database: CIMIC (i.e. the projects of ISAF units), the projects of the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), USAID and miscellaneous. The individual project records are updated using 25 variables. These variables are specified in annex A. To focus this research and point our analyses we screened all 25 variables on usefulness and uniqueness. For example, strategy measurement and regional differences are notable for performance measurement of nation building. Differences between the financial support of donor countries are for this research less useful. Since the dataset is large, approximately 85,000 project records, the variables were screened rigorously to give way to clear analyses. Calculation and re-coding of variables were then necessary steps to further detail our research results. For example the variables "cost", "start date" and "end date" have been used to calculate the variable "mean turnover per day" to analyze the absorption capacity as a performance measurement indicator.
2. MRA Institute & ISAF (2008). ANQAR 1.0: Afghanistan Nationwide Quarterly Assessment Research. Final presentation COMISAF. November 8, 2008.
3. MRA Institute & ISAF (2008). ANQAR 1.0: Afghanistan Nationwide Quarterly Assessment Research. Final presentation COMISAF. November 8, 2008